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Human Resources Management Examines itself and its Limitations

Solomon Barkin

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Résumé de l'article

Cet article est une critique de deux articles publiés dans *Relations Industrielles/Industrial Relations*, (Québec, vol. 44, no 1, 1989) sur la gestion des ressources humaines. Le premier, écrit par Ichniowski, Delaney et Lewin, (pp. 97-120), porte sur les résultats d'une enquête quant à la façon dont elle s'exerce dans les grandes entreprises américaines. L'autre, dont les auteurs sont Kochan et McKersie, présente un programme destiné à promouvoir son développement de manière à ce que les entreprises puissent atteindre un degré élevé de concurrence économique et de productivité.

Les deux groupes d'auteurs admettent l'hypothèse de la suprématie des employeurs, de leur pouvoir de décision unilatéral et de leur autorité absolue dans les entreprises.

Le premier article estime que les deux tiers de ces expériences en matière de gestion des ressources humaines ont été mises en place avant la décennie 1980 et qu'environ quarante pour cent d'entre elles sont antérieures à 1970. Elles ne sont donc pas nouvelles et elles «se sont modifiées graduellement au cours des années». Essentiellement, on a donné une nouvelle étiquette à un champ d'études et de pratiques déjà existant, soit, l'administration du personnel. Le sujet principal de leur étude porte sur le calcul et l'analyse du taux de pénétration de ces expériences dans les entreprises syndiquées et celles qui ne le sont pas. Les résultats sont fort contestables dans plusieurs catégories à cause du regroupement des genres d'expériences. On n'a pas tiré de lignes de démarcation nettes de façon à bien distinguer les pratiques de gestion dans chaque catégorie.

Le deuxième article expose, en la favorisant, un programme en vue d'assurer la plus large mesure possible de participation des employeurs et des salariés à de tels projets. Notant que, par elles-mêmes, les innovations technologiques ne seraient pas suffisantes pour atteindre les buts recherchés, les auteurs soulignent la nécessité d'intégrer «des considérations sur les ressources humaines à chaque étape du processus d'innovation technologique». L'article traite presque exclusivement de l'élément participation.

Le programme proposé est vague quant à la plupart des sujets, mais surtout en ce qui a trait à la représentation, à l'organisation et à la participation des travailleurs au sein de l'entreprise. Les auteurs suggèrent «un certain type de comité consultatif en matière de ressources humaines composé de l'ensemble des cols bleus et des cols blancs». Ils ont peur d'inciter à une action immédiate en vue d'améliorer l'efficacité du système actuel d'accréditation et de négociation des premières conventions collectives.

Cette réserve découle de la crainte de stimuler la syndicalisation des travailleurs, ce qui pourrait, selon eux, «conduire à un simple retour au modèle de négociation collective imposé par le *New Deal*» qu'ils associent à «une formule de fixation des salaires inflationnistes, à des règlements d'atelier rigides et à des relations du travail fortement antagonistes». Évitant de rendre plus limpides les éléments principaux d'un schéma de représentation, ils procèdent rapidement sans se donner la peine de définir comment les salariés devraient être choisis comme membres des comités d'entreprises et comment on assurerait la formation desdits comités, leur caractère bipartite et l'indépendance des représentants des travailleurs. Il s'agirait d'organismes consultatifs qui n'auraient pas de pouvoir de négociation, supposément afin d'éviter l'application des lois sur le travail et de protéger l'autorité absolue des employeurs.

L'expérience des comités d'entreprise dans les pays industrialisés auxquels les auteurs réfèrent indique que, même là où la loi et les conventions nationales les imposent, leur établissement repose sur le support des syndicats, leur efficacité, sur une formation appropriée des représentants des salariés par les syndicats, avec les conseils de ces derniers dans les affaires de nature technique et politique, et sur le rôle actif des syndicats dans le règlement des griefs portés devant les tribunaux du travail. Afin que ce programme se développe, les auteurs demandent au gouvernement de fournir le leadership nécessaire pour assurer que les dirigeants syndicaux et patronaux favorables aux innovations puissent y arriver par des négociations entre eux. Désapprouvant les efforts passés et actuels des pouvoirs publics, ils ne suggèrent toutefois aucune indication quant aux initiatives qu'ils espèrent voir entreprendre par le gouvernement.

Les auteurs reconnaissent aussi que, au niveau des entreprises, les programmes doivent être harmonisés et intégrés avec les politiques nationales en matière d'économie, d'éducation et de formation professionnelle. Mais étant donné l'absence de telles politiques aux États-Unis et l'opposition des employeurs à l'établissement de comités patronaux-syndicaux structurés, cette proposition est complètement théorique et néglige bien des secteurs d'activités valables. Comme pour le *Council of Economic Advisors*, elle porte presque exclusivement sur des enjeux économiques à court terme.

Les obstacles à l'instauration des programmes proposés sont nombreux, en particulier, la méfiance des syndicats et, dans maints cas, leur opposition totale à la mise en œuvre de politiques de gestion des ressources humaines ainsi que le refus des employeurs d'accepter le syndicalisme et la négociation collective. Les auteurs omettent de tenir compte des revendications présentes réclamant l'établissement d'un régime démocratique de relations industrielles.

DISCUSSION

Human Resources Management Examines itself and its limitations

Solomon Barkin

In the present paper, the author is analysing and criticizing the prevalence of human resources management (HRM) in the study of industrial relations over the past few years, as shown in a previous article of this journal. This controversial topic is subject to discussion and exchange of views which can be sustained through this forum.

Having probably reached the maximum promotion of human resources management programs its votaries are beginning to reexamine their prescriptions, qualify their claims and acknowledge the need for a wider range of initiatives to be truly effective. New challenges and changing conditions prod them to move into broader directions. The two articles under discussion represent early reflections of this new period. The first group of writers is associated with Columbia University (Ichniowski, Delaney and Lewin)¹ and the second with M.I.T. (Kochan and McKersie)².

Both groups of writers of these articles reaffirm their dedication to the primacy of management, its unilateral decision-making power and its sovereignty within the enterprise. Each omits consideration of critics' positions or arguments. Neither examines or refers to industrial democracy, a key issue in the field of industrial governance. The basic assumption of

* BARKIN, S., Professor, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Mass., U.S.A.

¹ Casey ICHNIOWSKI, John Thomas DELANEY and David LEWIN, «The New Human Resource Management in U.S. Workplace: Is it Really New and is it Only Nonunion?», *Relations Industrielles*, Vol. 44, No. 1, Winter 1989, pp. 97-119.

² Thomas A. KOCHAN and Robert B. MCKERSIE, «Future Directions for American Labor and Human Resource Policy», *ibid.*, pp. 224-248.

these writers is that management is to remain the sole player at the executive corporate level, the selector and determiner of enterprise policies and practices. Some members of this group of writers are willing to face the reality of union organization and concede that the latter may be allowed to constrain management in limited areas and indirectly affect decisions. But they should not contest or jar management's basic rights and conceptions. Similarly, governmental intervention into decision-making and in the selection of policy and practice should be kept to a minimum, except where they reinforce managements' power. Non-governmental agencies are to be preferred to governmental ones in the application and administration of policies, for the former are also more responsive, flexible and innovative.

Both papers relate to recent studies and examinations of human resource management programs. Derived from different settings, they offer interesting insights into the changing nature of this course. The first stems from research initiated in 1986 at Columbia University and reflects the views of business executives who answered lengthy questionnaires distributed by the investigators respecting their policies and practices. The second, the M.I.T. Group, represents recent thinking at one of the bastions of research, writing and open advocacy of the programs at many forums. Presumably these authors have also benefited from the growing awareness within the United States of the many difficulties and problems generated by the conservative policies advocated and implemented by the Reagan Administration. The authors recognize that they have to complement their prior micro-orientation of issues focusing on individual enterprises and workplaces with macro-views of manpower, personnel and labor relations problems. In moving to this level of reflection they partially recouple their thinking to the prevailing in this field in the earlier postwar decades. The entire piece appears to be a trial balloon to recruit employees, unions and the federal government in a drive for greater economic competitiveness by American economic agents led by management from which no quid pro quo is being exacted.

The contributions of the Columbia paper can be best appreciated by raising four underlying propositions pertinent to the evaluation of human resource management programs. The first is whether this package, the contents of which are still to be defined precisely, is oriented toward unilateralism in decision-making. The second is whether these programs introduce practices different from those traditionally identified with personnel management³. Does this program primarily present a relabeling of an existing collection of practices with a trendier title attached to same as has occurred in a number of fields⁴? Are the primary goals similar to those of prior programs? Does this system develop a docile work force devoted to the enterprise and management goals and objectives untroubled by issues of dual loyalty to an independent worker organization? Finally, do these

³ Solomon BARKIN, «A Trade Unionist Appraises Management Personnel Philosophy», *Harvard Business Review*, Vol. xxviii, No. 5, September 1950, pp. 59-64.

⁴ An illustration in Canada of this change is the action of the Montréal Personnel Association which recently changed its name to the Association of Human Resource Professionals of the Province of Québec.

policies and practices and the subsequent rules and benefits differ in unionized and nonunion business units? Do unions support, resist or avoid these policies and practices and with how much fervor? Are they equally and vigorously enforced and do they equally promote employee interests?

The first paper answers two questions. On the first the authors observe that in plants pursuing these policies, «management normally retains unilateral control» and they are «likely to reflect management's notion of appropriate employment rules» (p. 98). As for the second question relating to the date of introduction of the practices, the survey finds that about two-thirds of them were adopted before the eighties, the decade when human resource management was popularized (pp. 111-114). About forty percent appeared before the 1970s, with some initiated in the thirties and forties. (No explanation offered as to the likely reason for the rising penetration rates in the later decades in the unionized as compared with the nonunion units.)

The authors conclude that «many progressive HRM policies and practices are not new. They have existed in the U.S. business units for almost two decades [...] These HRM policies and practices have evolved gradually over the years. Thus the findings do not support the assertion that a new nonunion HRM model has just recently emerged» (p. 116). Some practices, the authors note, were introduced to forestall unionization among employees⁵.

As for the fourth test of differences between unionized and nonunion business units, we face difficulties in analyzing the data to reach final conclusions because of the conglomerate nature of each of the four categories of practices. No sharply delimited definitions are offered to guide the respondents. Most allow for the inclusion of opposite practices within each category. This fact is in part recognized in several instances by the authors but no provision is made for isolating them in calculating penetration rates. In the case of grievance procedures, they report that in unionized units, almost all cap their procedures with independent arbitration by an outside referee (94,4 percent) whereas in the nonunion units only one fifth adopted this arrangement (21,2 percent). In the case of the category of employee involvement, no distinctions are offered about the nature of the «involvement». We have only to remember the intense struggle over the acceptability of company unions in the middle thirties and the decision to consider them illegal to recognize the superficiality and possibly misleading nature of the frequency figures offered for some categories. Among industrial relations experts and unionists, the line is drawn between «free unions», company-dominated ones and governmentally dominated ones (as found in the Communist bloc). Similar divisions would have made the findings of this survey more relevant.

Most significant in pointing up the need for more precise categories is the lower frequency rates for practices in nonunion than in union units

⁵ Solomon BARKIN, «Critique of the IRRA Comprehensive Review Committee Report», Paper delivered at the Annual Meeting of the *Industrial Relations Research Association*, New York City, December 29, 1988.

respecting merit-based promotions and lay-offs and performance appraisals. Also the number of job classifications per employee is reported to be markedly lower in union units (Table 1, p. 102).

As to the functioning of these practices, the present writer can report from his experience that the term information systems including attitude surveys can hardly serve to reveal the nature of the practice in unionized and nonunion units. Though the authors report almost equivalent penetration rates for the two types of units, they are in fact profoundly different. As a union officer he observed that when local unions learn of the likelihood of such surveys being made, they are likely first to identify the consultants and the nature of the questions they customarily employ. The union membership is thereafter assembled in shop meetings to counsel members on the answers which would best serve the group, usually accenting the most pressing complaints and grievances. As for information sharing, the nature of the data and methods of utilizing them differ widely therefore negating the practical value of the categories for learning about the nature of operations.

One must challenge one central conclusion in this paper that «union-nonunion differences [do not] exist in workplace policies and practices that are not typically the subject of collective bargaining» (p. 109).

As for the third question, it gets little attention. It would appear that the primary goals remain the same under HRM. No field evaluations are offered of the operation of these policies and practices to determine their substantive contents and the benefits enjoyed by employees in the two different types of units. Hopefully, the promised future studies will shed light on these issues.

We approach the issues respecting the second paper — M.I.T. Study (Thomas A. Kochan and Robert B. McKersie) — in a similar manner considering six underlying questions. The first is to whom do the authors address their proposals? The second is what are their goals? The third, what are the mechanisms to be employed to achieve the ends? The fourth is what policy systems have to be coordinated or linked for the effective realization of the program? Fifth, what administrative systems should be established to achieve the goals? Finally, what, if any, prescriptions should be laid down for the bargaining system? Again, we note that the paper offers a plan for achieving higher national productivity, and therefore «competitiveness» and to assure the widest possible rate of personnel participation and business units in this program. The individual successful units and unionists who support this approach are to provide the models and leadership for diffusing the plans.

As for the first proposition the primary appeal is to management who must shoulder the responsibility for introducing the «competitive strategies that treat workers as strategic resources worth investing in or cost factors to be minimized and controlled as tightly as possible» (p. 236). Government is to «create the policy environment [...] and provide the political leadership needed to insure that the labor and management leaders arguing for the innovative course carry the day in these internal debates» (p. 236). Union leaders supporting these policies would promote them within the trade union movement. It is not clear what awards and incentives or penalties will government employ for its functions.

In considering the second proposition, the primary appeal is to management which is to advance the business units' competitiveness through improvements in productivity, «quality of goods and services produced and the innovative capacity of American enterprises» (p. 230). (No mention is made that American producers should respond effectively to consumer needs in foreign countries, the particular skills of German and Japanese producers.) The authors contend that technology alone will not assure the desired result. It must be integrated «with human resource considerations (worker skills, participation and employment adjustment concerns) [...] into each stage of the technological innovation process» (p. 230). The incentive for labor presumably is the promise of higher earnings, living standards and greater influence in the operations. No process is outlined for assuring employees their benefits, except that it may be inferred that the recurrent use of the bargaining concept will allow unions to prod management to share their gains with employees. For government the promise is higher rates of national productivity and competitiveness. (No allusion is made to the possible need to reorient management policy to encourage the location of new job sites in this, rather than in foreign, countries.)

As for the third proposition, the principal mechanism offered for producing the operational programs is the installation of human resource practices and in particular, labor-management cooperation. In discussing the first paper, we noted that most programs antedate the recent popularization of the term human resource management. Presumably their previous use have not had the effects nor been as widely defused as had been hoped, otherwise this appeal would not be advanced. An extensive enumeration of these failings is missing here and in previous publications by the authors, or is the current theme for governmental support of the program the key to the future successes? (pp. 224, 227 and 230).

The human resource practice they dwell on are education and training, both highly developed in the United States with many governmental and professional groups advancing their cause. A detailed recitation is need of the deficiencies of current efforts, besides those already recited by many national commissions both for the young and adults to see what novelties or new emphases they would urge.

One major theme in the article is their position that «labor law reform is a necessary, but not a sufficient or complete, labor policy reform» (p. 235). They declare that «to provide workers with this ability today will require fundamental changes in our labor policies that go well beyond minor reforms in procedures governing union representation election and first contract negotiation» (p. 235). Neither unions nor managements are likely to agree to the characterization of these changes as minor reforms. Stressing that «such reforms are likely to be insufficient» they make no plea for the urgency of early action but rather appear to be willing to lie back and wait for the outcome of the debates between the 'traditionalists' and the advocates of more recent strategies (pp. 235-36). They are nevertheless troubled about the possible outcome for it «will determine the extent to which labor-management relations contribute to or constrain the will-

ingness and ability of employers to adopt competitive strategies that treat workers as strategic resources worth investing in» (p. 236). The present writer is troubled by these words which vaguely suggest that the authors would like to cajole management with incentives.

The authors are not clear as to their belief in the need for assuring the independence and representativeness of employee spokesmen. What price they are willing to pay to achieve their ends and whether in making such concessions they are concurrently dooming their own program to failure.

In dealing with the fourth proposition relating to the need for the coordination of the policy systems, the authors clearly revert to the thinking of the early postwar years. Western countries including the United States recognized the need of interrelating the various policy systems to achieve a nation's objectives. One United States example of such action is the *Employment Act* of 1946 which created the Council of Economic Advisers and a Congressional Joint Economic Committee. In the seventies Congress considered the formation of a Council on Social Policy Advisers which gained support among academic groups and independent organizations such as the National Planning Association. The federal government in advancing this effort published a report on social indicators. International intergovernmental agencies also initiated work in these areas, particularly in the field of manpower policy by seeking methods of coordinating their efforts with those in other fields, particularly economics, education both for the young and adults, health, housing, community facilities and services and social policy. No doubt we would now add environmental issues. We should include business leadership and management. The latter has become necessary for several reasons: the far-reaching role of business leadership in our economy, the widespread criticism that the exercise of that leadership has generated the abuses, failings and questionable practices amongst those leaders which, it might be argued, are responsible for the loss of national competitiveness.

Inasmuch as the present paper only considers linking human resources, labor relations and economic policy, it is well to note that other countries have learned the need for far-reaching coordination with other areas directly impacting on manpower policy. The neglect of housing provisions has immediate effects on the recruitment of personnel and its stability within the enterprise and wage demands. Poor and incompetent social policy spells deficient adjustment programs. Many people have already underscored the handicaps we suffer from the deterioration of our schooling facilities for both the young and the adults. Close coordination would call for attention to living standards and job security⁷.

While the writer is most favorable to the underlying suggestion for coordination of policy systems, several practical conditions must be noted for the United States. This country lacks institutions through which such

⁷ Solomon BARKIN, *Manpower Policy, Economic Policy Instrument and Independent Policy System*, Prospectus for a seminar, Washington D.C., U.S. Department of Labor Manpower Administration, Grant 91-23-69-20, 1973; Chapter I, «Active Economic and Manpower Policies» appeared as Reprint No. 43, Amherst Mass., Labor Relations and Research Center.

linkages may be effected except for economic and foreign policies. As for the former, the present Council of Economic Advisers primarily concentrates on short term problems of stability and inflation. Unsuccessful efforts in the seventies to create a complementary institution to consider long term economic issues left a great gap in our organizational framework.

In considering the administrative structure for their system, the authors list three agencies in addition to the bargaining arrangements in the enterprise. The first is labor representation on boards of directors. Their comments on European experience indicates an awareness of one way in which management members have circumvented real labor participation. They have followed the practice of reaching prior agreements among themselves on subjects to be considered at Board meetings. In Germany employers succeeded in amending the law to prevent unions reaching the goal of parity of representation by allotting one labor seat to management employees and allowing the management chairman to cast deciding votes in case of a deadlock. Similar techniques are also not uncommon to frustrate these agencies. As evaluative studies are few in number, we have to resort to personal conversations. The writers' conclusion from these discussions is that labor representatives have at best occasionally helped humanize personnel policy and influenced decisions on plant locations, shut-downs and the frequency and extent of foreign acquisitions but they have not impacted on the balance of economic power in the enterprises. As for unionists on American boards of directors, their public reports are fewer than even their meager number and these fail to brighten the above picture.

In the above category might be included the operation of the Swedish employee funds built up from taxes and assignments of shares of corporate profits. Union members sit as full-fledged members of the corporate boards. Criticism is voiced in the country on the manner of operation of the program for investment and union influence upon corporations. Much has still to be learned about making these moves more meaningful for the membership to consider these arrangements as providing a significant dimension in the package of benefits in the labor management relationship.

The authors propose as another alternative «some type of human resource advisory council composed of representatives of all blue and white collar workers [...] to insure that human resource policy issues are more fully taken into account in all stages of business and technology strategy making [...]» (pp. 241-42). Similar to the European works councils, most of these countries have such councils either by reason of law or national collective agreements. Despite this sponsorship, many plants remain without them. It often requires the unions prodding management to bring them into being. Even then, they may resort to other agencies such as quality circles as in France to avoid the council. Where they are effective union members dominate the agencies. In several countries unions are specifically allowed on invitation to attend the council's meeting and advise it on issues. In Germany in case of disputes, the union brings the question to the labor courts. In several countries unions maintain special educational programs to train the council members on their duties and union views on critical issues.

A necessary antecedent for meaningful operation of these plans is the existence of an organized workforce rather than a mere formal pronouncement of their usefulness. It is hardly likely to be reassuring to unions to give their support to vague programs (such as the company unions or employee representation schemes) on the basis of statements that in the past, in the thirties in the steel industry in particular, these have constituted the base for the later formation of independent unions. One may as well move directly to union organization.

As for the suggestion of industry-level patterns of coordination, it is well known that unions have favored such agencies but have had little success in getting them established. Even in the few cases where they have arrangements in the United States they have been largely informal structures and related principally to efforts to secure governmental aid.

The authors omit all discussion of how and by whom the members of these various councils are to be selected and with what representational authority they would be vested. They are however troubled by the legal barriers to the establishment of such councils, where regular bargaining agencies do not exist. It would appear that the easiest step for them to take is to encourage all groups to follow the existing system of designation through the labor relations system and to favor the easing of the procedures to which the authors refer as minor procedural reforms⁸.

The authors mistakenly over that «insuring workers have an effective right to organize will be especially important for improving the economic status of workers in low wage service occupations» (p. 239). The observation flies in face of the historic reality that the first groups to organize are the higher wage groups.

The last proposition relates to the prescriptions for the labor-management bargaining systems. It is in the final pages of this article that they reveal their attitude to collective bargaining as a system of governance for the workplace. The clearest statement is the one which reads that «to insure that enhanced opportunities to organize produces macro economic and social benefits additional efforts will be required on the part of federal policy makers. There will be few macro economic benefits if increased unionization results only in a resurgence of inflationary wage setting formulas, rigid work rules and highly adversarial labor-management relations. A simple return to the New Deal collective bargaining model will not ad-

⁸ The authors do not discuss the interlocking connection of the plant agencies and national policy instruments except that it may be inferred that they believe that governmental policy should be designed to encourage plant agencies and that benefits or incentives shall be distributed by the government to them. Our major experience with such an instrument is in the unemployment insurance system. It prescribed a system of employer rating to encourage the stabilization of employment. The results of this system which drew its inspiration from individual experiments at the beginning of the thirties have been faulty. The unemployment insurance system has led to destructive state competition, narrowing coverage and low benefits.

dress the competitive challenges facing the U.S. economy» (pp. 239-40)⁹. This dictum resonates the positions of early members of the economics profession. Both Richard Ely and John R. Commons, each in his own way abandoned the espousal of the union cause when organized labor appeared to depart from their models of behavior. Ely took this critical step on the occasion of the Pullman strike of 1894 and Commons, as a member of the 1915 Industrial Relations Commission in his minority report. We would not like to see a similar act of abandonment repeated at this time because the union movement pursues its own course determined and followed by its membership. The recent strike of the machinists supported voluntarily by the other organizations of the Eastern Airlines would suggest that there may be many good reasons for their action which for the short term may appear to be disruptive but have favorable long term benefits. It would be unrealistic as well as in conflict with the basic practices of our political and social system to ask so-called «policy makers» to couple support for labor-management reform with a narrow vision of labor relations dedicated solely to the promotion of «productivity and quality enhancing bargaining strategies» (p. 240). More effective would be to support the development of independent organizations and collective bargaining to encourage conditions which favor union membership and thereby create the environment for cooperation.

For the realization of such programs, advocates of human resource management have much work laid out ahead of them. In terms of objective conditions, the present paradoxes are enormous. The conditions do not favor narrow visions. Employees have witnessed the deterioration of their wage and working conditions during the last few years and are alert to the improvements recurrently reported to be able to recover and rehabilitate their positions. It is made even less salutary by the recent upsurge of corporate profits, business executive salaries and benefits and the huge rise in salaries among professionals, particularly those in the financial areas.

The great handicap facing the authors' undertaking is that the human resource management activities are viewed most suspiciously by trade unionists. Evidence of this negative response is provided by a current statement by the Special Review Body and adopted by the British Trade Union Congress in September 1988. In Paragraph 37 it declares that «union in-

9 This is not the place to challenge these questionable characterizations and judgments of the American collective bargaining system. We shall address only the third of these charges about its adversarial nature. A close study of the operations would probably have impressed the authors that the broadly organized areas and industries are those in which one finds the celebrated stable long enduring cooperative labor relations systems. Adversarial relations became common largely in the mid-thirties when companies in the large industries were determined to combat union advances by engaging attorneys to resist unions in organizing, negotiations and in the administration of contracts.

The writer has offered an alternative view to understanding of the American industrial relations system and its history in «Selected Aspects of the CIO Experience», *Proceedings of the 38th Annual Meeting, IRR*, New York, 1986, pp. 187-195; «The Current Unilateralist Counterattack on Unionism and Collective Bargaining», *Relations Industrielles*, Vol. 41, No. 1, 1986, pp. 3-26.

fluence is being challenged because of other management trends such as the increasing management emphasis on winning the commitment of the individual employee (human resources management)¹⁰. The AFL-CIO offers a more subdued expression. It appeals to management to engage in «a cooperative approach to solving shared present and future problems [... but adds that] until the time our desire for cooperation is fully reciprocated, unions must be prepared to meet employer confrontation»¹¹.

These papers are welcome contributions to a more realistic understanding of people considered leaders in the human resources management school of thinking. A dialogue may now be constructively developed if they would be forthright about their positions and will to come to terms with those representing the trade union movement. President Harry Truman tried to effect such an understanding at the end of the forties and failed. Now management must agree to the tenet that unions are the spokesmen and representatives of the employees. Then the parties can negotiate specific policies. The labor negotiators must be bona fide independent spokesmen. If a balance is sought then prescriptions must be applied to both sides, employers and management and employees and unions. Current policies and practices must be evaluated. Coordination must be developed for all direct and cognate fields of policy. Cooperation depends not only on reaching understandings on problems affecting the workshop but also those relating to homes and community facilities and services. We embarked on this course during the New Deal days and made much progress; now we must return to a similar course designed for the distinctive issues of the day, including the need for greater competitiveness of American economic agents.

¹⁰ BRITISH TRADES UNION CONGRESS, *Meeting the Challenge, First Report of the Special Review Body*, London, TUC 1988, p. 6.

¹¹ AFL-CIO, Committee on the Evolution of Work, *The Changing Situation of Workers and their Unions*, Washington D.C., AFL-CIO, 1985.

L'étude de la gestion des ressources humaines et ses limitations

Cet article est une critique de deux articles publiés dans *Relations Industrielles/Industrial Relations*, (Québec, vol. 44, no 1, 1989) sur la gestion des ressources humaines. Le premier, écrit par Ichniowski, Delaney et Lewin, (pp. 97-120), porte sur les résultats d'une enquête quant à la façon dont elle s'exerce dans les grandes entreprises américaines. L'autre, dont les auteurs sont Kochan et McKersie, présente un programme destiné à promouvoir son développement de manière à ce que les entreprises puissent atteindre un degré élevé de concurrence économique et de productivité. Les deux groupes d'auteurs admettent l'hypothèse de la suprématie des employeurs, de leur pouvoir de décision unilatéral et de leur autorité absolue dans les entreprises.

Le premier article estime que les deux tiers de ces expériences en matière de gestion des ressources humaines ont été mises en place avant la décennie 1980 et qu'environ quarante pour cent d'entre elles sont antérieures à 1970. Elles ne sont donc pas nouvelles et elles «se sont modifiées graduellement au cours des années». Essentiellement, on a donné une nouvelle étiquette à un champ d'études et de pratiques déjà existant, soit, l'administration du personnel. Le sujet principal de leur étude porte sur le calcul et l'analyse du taux de pénétration de ces expériences dans les entreprises syndiquées et celles qui ne le sont pas. Les résultats sont fort contestables dans plusieurs catégories à cause du regroupement des genres d'expériences. On n'a pas tiré de lignes de démarcation nettes de façon à bien distinguer les pratiques de gestion dans chaque catégorie.

Le deuxième article expose, en la favorisant, un programme en vue d'assurer la plus large mesure possible de participation des employeurs et des salariés à de tels projets. Notant que, par elles-mêmes, les innovations technologiques ne seraient pas suffisantes pour atteindre les buts recherchés, les auteurs soulignent la nécessité d'intégrer «des considérations sur les ressources humaines à chaque étape du processus d'innovation technologique». L'article traite presque exclusivement de l'élément participation.

Le programme proposé est vague quant à la plupart des sujets, mais surtout en ce qui a trait à la représentation, à l'organisation et à la participation des travailleurs au sein de l'entreprise. Les auteurs suggèrent «un certain type de comité consultatif en matière de ressources humaines composé de l'ensemble des cols bleus et des cols blancs». Ils ont peur d'inciter à une action immédiate en vue d'améliorer l'efficacité du système actuel d'accréditation et de négociation des premières conventions collectives. Cette réserve découle de la crainte de stimuler la syndicalisation des travailleurs, ce qui pourrait, selon eux, «conduire à un simple retour au modèle de négociation collective imposé par le *New Deal*» qu'ils associent à «une formule de fixation des salaires inflationnistes, à des règlements d'atelier rigides et à des relations du travail fortement antagonistes». Évitant de rendre plus limpides les éléments principaux d'un schéma de représentation, ils procèdent rapidement sans se donner la peine de définir comment les salariés devraient être choisis comme membres des comités d'en-

treprises et comment on assurerait la formation desdits comités, leur caractère bipartite et l'indépendance des représentants des travailleurs. Il s'agirait d'organismes consultatifs qui n'auraient pas de pouvoir de négociation, supposément afin d'éviter l'application des lois sur le travail et de protéger l'autorité absolue des employeurs.

L'expérience des comités d'entreprise dans les pays industrialisés auxquels les auteurs réfèrent indique que, même là où la loi et les conventions nationales les imposent, leur établissement repose sur le support des syndicats, leur efficacité, sur une formation appropriée des représentants des salariés par les syndicats, avec les conseils de ces derniers dans les affaires de nature technique et politique, et sur le rôle actif des syndicats dans le règlement des griefs portés devant les tribunaux du travail.

Afin que ce programme se développe, les auteurs demandent au gouvernement de fournir le leadership nécessaire pour assurer que les dirigeants syndicaux et patronaux favorables aux innovations puissent y arriver par des négociations entre eux. Désapprouvant les efforts passés et actuels des pouvoirs publics, ils ne suggèrent toutefois aucune indication quant aux initiatives qu'ils espèrent voir entreprendre par le gouvernement.

Les auteurs reconnaissent aussi que, au niveau des entreprises, les programmes doivent être harmonisés et intégrés avec les politiques nationales en matière d'économie, d'éducation et de formation professionnelle. Mais étant donné l'absence de telles politiques aux États-Unis et l'opposition des employeurs à l'établissement de comités patronaux-syndicaux structurés, cette proposition est complètement théorique et néglige bien des secteurs d'activités valables. Comme pour le *Council of Economic Advisors*, elle porte presque exclusivement sur des enjeux économiques à court terme.

Les obstacles à l'instauration des programmes proposés sont nombreux, en particulier, la méfiance des syndicats et, dans maints cas, leur opposition totale à la mise en oeuvre de politiques de gestion des ressources humaines ainsi que le refus des employeurs d'accepter le syndicalisme et la négociation collective. Les auteurs omettent de tenir compte des revendications présentes réclamant l'établissement d'un régime démocratique de relations industrielles.